

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 PM-04 NSC-05 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1879
USDEL SECRETARY AIRCRAFT IMMEDIATE
USINFO WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 3 DAMASCUS 1209

PASS WHITE HOUSE FOR POWELL, BRZEZINSKI

SECRETARY'S PARTY FOR CARTER

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS R.)
SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE, DAMASCUS, FEBRUARY 21

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY SECRETARY TO
ACCOMPANYING PRESS PARTY AND REGIONAL TELEVISION CREWS.

2. QUOTE.

SECRETARY: WHEN I STARTED OUT, I INDICATED THAT I HAD SEVERAL
OBJECTIVES IN MIND. THE FIRST OBJECTIVE WAS TO INDICATE THE
IMPORTANCE THAT THE PRESIDENT AND I ATTACHED TO THE QUESTION OF
PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE SECOND WAS TO GET A CHANCE TO
MEET THE LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS COUNTRIES INVOLVED AND
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THEIR PRINCIPAL ADVISORS. AND THE THIRD WAS TO GET A CHANCE TO
LEARN FIRST HAND THEIR VIEWS AND HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO
DISCUSS THOSE VIEWS WITH THEM IN AN EFFORT TO OBTAIN A
CLEARER UNDERSTANDING AND TO FIND WHERE THERE MIGHT BE
AREAS OF COMMON GROUND WITH THE POSITIONS OF OTHERS. WITH
RESPECT TO EACH OF THESE OBJECTIVES I FEEL SATISFIED THAT THEY
HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. EVERYONE OF THE LEADERS TO WHOM I

TALKED INDICATED AN APPRECIATION OF THE FACT THAT THIS MISSION WAS TAKEN AT THIS TIME AND THE REASSURANCE THAT IT GAVE TO THEM THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE UNITED STATES ATTACHED TO THE QUESTION OF A RESOLUTION OF THE MIDDLE EAST QUESTION. SECONDLY, I FOUND IT WAS INDEED IMPORTANT TO MEET THESE MEN FACE TO FACE. AS ASAD SAID TO ME YESTERDAY, AFTERNOON, THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR SEEING A MAN FACT TO FACE, AND HAVING A CHANCE TO LOOK HIM IN THE EYE. WITH RESPECT TO THE FINAL OBJECTIVE, I DO FEEL THAT I HAVE A MUCH CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF THE VIEWS OF THE PARTIES AND AN IDEA WITH RESPECT TO THOSE AREAS WHERE THERE MAY BE COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON AGREEMENT. LET ME BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THOSE AREAS FOR YOU. FIRST, ALL THE PARTIES ARE AGREED ON THE NEED FOR PEACE. EVERYONE OF THE LEADERS POINTED OUT TO ME THE IMPORTANCE OF CUTTING BACK ON MILITARY EXPENDITURES AND PUTTING THOSE RESOURCES INTO MEETING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF THEIR COUNTRIES. THERE WASN'T ONE THAT DIDN'T UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TO ME. SECONDLY, ALL OF THE PARTIES STATED THAT THEY'RE PREPARED TO GO TO A GENEVA CONFERENCE IN THE LAST HALF OF 1977 TO DISCUSS AN OVERALL PEACE SETTLEMENT. (IF I'M GOING TOO FAST, LET ME KNOW.) THIRDLY, ALL OF THE PARTIES AGREED THAT IF PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS CAN BE RESOLVED, THEY ARE PREPARED ALL SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS AT GENEVA WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS. AND FINALLY, ALL THE PARTIES ARE AGREED AS TO THE GENERAL NATURE OF THE THREE CORE ELEMENTS. OF A FINAL SETTLEMENT, NAMELY PEACE, WITHDRAWAL AND RESOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION. THE TWO SIDES ARE DEEPLY DIVIDED, HOWEVER, ON THE DEFINITION AND METHODS OF RESOLVING THESE THREE CORE ISSUES. FIRST, ON THE DEFINITION OF WHAT PEACE MEANS. ON THE ONE HAND YOU HAVE THE VIEW THAT

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PEACE IS AN END OF WAR, AND THAT IS GENERALLY THE ARAB VIEW. AND ONE MUST EXPECT TIME TO PASS BEFORE THERE CAN BE NORMAL RELATIONS ACROSS THE BOARD BETWEEN COUNTRIES THAT HAVE BEEN AT WAR, IN A STATE OF BELLIGERENCY FOR YEARS AND YEARS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ISRAELIS WOULD DEFINE PEACE AS BASICALLY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FULL NORMAL RELATIONS. AND AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE IS A VERY BROAD GAP BETWEEN THESE TWO VIEWS. SECONDLY, THERE IS A CLEAR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES ON THE MEANING OF SHAPE OF WITHDRAWAL. AND FINALLY, THERE IS A DIFFERENCE OF VIEWS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES ON HOW TO RESOLVE THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE APPEAR TO BE EVEN DIFFERENCES AMONG THE ARABS THEMSELVES AS TO HOW THAT QUESTION SHOULD BE RESOLVED. AND FINALLY, THE PARTIES ARE SHARPLY DIVIDED ON THE KEY PROCEDURAL QUESTION OF HOW TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF THE PLO. SO AS YOU CAN SEE, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE COMMON AREAS OF UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT, THERE ARE ALSO VERY SHARP DIFFERENCES. AND THE CONCLUSION THAT I DRAW FROM THAT IS THAT ONE MUST BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO BE OVER-OPTIMISTIC, AS KING HUSSEIN CAUTIONED WHEN WE WERE IN AMMAN, ON THE OTHER

HAND, THERE ARE AREAS OF COMMON GROUND WHICH PROVIDE A BASIS FOR SOME ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FACT THAT ALL OF THEM REALLY DO, SINCERELY, IN MY JUDGMENT, BELIEVE THAT THERE IS A DESPERATE NEED FOR PEACE. THAT IS A POSITIVE FACTOR. THOSE ARE VERY PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS I HAVE COME TO AS I START THE LAST DAY OF THIS VISIT.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, YOU SAY THAT ALL SIDES AGREE THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO GET INTO GENEVA DISCUSSION IN THE SECOND HALF OF THIS YEAR. AND YET THERE STILL ARE SOME BASIC DISAGREEMENTS ON THE BASIC PROCEDURAL ISSUE OF HOW TO HANDLE THE PLO. WHY IS EVERYONE EXPECTING TO GET INTO THOSE DISCUSSIONS THIS YEAR UNLESS THEY CAN OVERCOME THAT PROCEDURAL QUESTION?

SECRETARY: WHAT I SAID WAS THAT ALL OF THEM ARE PREPARED TO GO TO GENEVA AND HOPE THAT THEY COULD GO TO GENEVA IN THE LAST HALF OF THE YEAR.
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QUESTION: DO YOU HAVE A FEELING THAT THAT PROCEDURAL PROBLEM CAN BE OVERCOME, MR. SECRETARY?

SECRETARY: I DO NOT HAVE AN ANSWER YET, NOR DO THEY. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS THAT FACES US.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, DOES ONE APPROACH TO THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION AT GENEVA SEEM TO HAVE MORE FAVOR THAN THE OTHERS? AND IF SO, COULD YOU OUTLINE IT FOR US?

SECRETARY: NO, AT THIS POINT THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ONE THAT'S MORE FAVORED THAN THE OTHERS AMONG THE PARTIES. THERE SEEMS TO BE A WIDE VARIANCE OF VIEW ON THIS ISSUE AT THIS POINT.

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QUESTION: DID SADAT'S PROPOSAL SEEM TO HAVE THE ENDORSEMENT OF ANYBODY ELSE? THAT IS, THE JORDANIAN-PALESTINIAN LINK BEFORE GENEVA?

SECRETARY: OTHER LEADERS SAID THAT THEY WERE INTERESTED IN IT, AND WANTED TO STUDY IT, THEY FELT THAT THEY NEEDED TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF PRECISELY WHAT WAS MEANT BY IT.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, YOU SAID THAT THEY ALL AGREED ON THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES TO GO TO GENEVA WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS. IT HAS BEEN A BASIC ISRAELI THING THAT THEY WOULD NEVER NEGOTIATE WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS. AND IN THE PAST THEY HAVE INCLUDED AMONG THE PRECONDITIONS THE STANDARD ARAB INTERPRETATION OF 242, WHICH IS ALL -- EVERY INCH -- EVERY LAST GRAIN OF SAND OF TERRITORY. DOES THAT MEAN THAT ASAD, FOR EXAMPLE, IS NOW READY TO NEGOTIATE THIS POINT?

SECRETARY: THE WAY I PUT THE QUESTION TO THEM, I SAID, ASSUMING UNCLASSIFIED

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ALL PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS ARE OUT OF THE WAY, ARE YOU PREPARED TO GO TO GENEVA TO DISCUSS ALL SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS? THE ANSWER I GOT WAS, YES.

QUESTION: WITHOUT A FOR INSTANCE.

SECRETARY: WITHOUT A FOR INSTANCE.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, I WANT TO ASK YOU A GENERAL QUESTION OF WHAT PEACE MEANS. YOU STATED VERY PRECISELY THAT FOR THE ARABS PEACE WAS THE END OF WAR, AND THAT TIME MUST PASS BEFORE NORMAL RELATIONS COULD BEGIN.

SECRETARY: LET ME ADD THAT IT MIGHT VARY BETWEEN COUNTRIES WITH RESPECT TO THE RELATIONS BETWEEN X AND Y, THAT THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO MOVE AT A FASTER PACE THAN BETWEEN X AND Z.

QUESTION: WHAT I WANT TO ASK YOU IS, AS YOU KNOW, THE ISRAELIS HAVE SAID THEY DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP THE TERRITORY THAT THEY WON IN 1967 THIS TIME WITHOUT SOME FIRM GUARANTEES THAT THERE WILL BE REAL PEACE, OR A TRADE WITH SOME OF THE OTHER THINGS THAT THEY DEFINE AS REAL PEACE. IS IT YOUR VIEW THAT IN A FINAL SETTLEMENT WHICH WOULD COME OUT OF GENEVA, THE END OF GENEVA, HOWEVER LONG THAT TOOK, THAT THE ISRAELIS WANT TO GET SOME ELEMENTS OF REAL PEACE?

SECRETARY: I DON'T WANT TO COMMENT ON WHAT ANY OF THE PARTIES ARE TO GET AT THIS POINT. IT'S OBVIOUS THAT THESE THREE CORE ELEMENTS ARE INTERTWINED WITH EACH OTHER. AND THAT'S ONE OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WHEN PEOPLE DO GO TO GENEVA.

QUESTION: I JUST WANT TO BE CLEAR. YOU ARE NOT, ON THE OTHER HAND SUPPORTING THE ARAB VIEW THAT PEACE...

SECRETARY: I'M NOT SUPPORTING ANYBODY'S VIEW AT THIS POINT. I'M NOT SUPPORTING ANYBODY'S VIEW.
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QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, WHAT DID PRESIDENT ASAD TELL YOU ABOUT THE WILLINGNESS OF THE PLO TO EITHER SET UP A WEST BANK STATE, REWRITE THE COVENANT, OR...

SECRETARY: HE SAID HE COULD NOT SPEAK FOR THE PLO.

QUESTION: DID HE GIVE YOU ANY INDICATION OF THEIR ATTITUDE, OF WHAT MIGHT BE DEVELOPING IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PLO?

SECRETARY: NOTHING.

QUESTION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

SECRETARY: I WILL GO BACK TO THE UNITEE STATES AND REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT IMMEDIATELY THE RESULTS OF THE TRIP. WE WILL THEN REFLECT AND BEGIN TO DEVELOP OUR VIEWS WITH RESPECT TO THE WAY THAT WE CAN BEST PROCEED TO HELP MOVE TOWARDS A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. THE VARIOUS HEADS OF GOVERNMENT WILL BE COMING TO THE UNITED STATES, WITH ONE EXCEPTION WHICH I WILL REFER TO IN A MINUTE, TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT AS WE CONTINUE THE PROCESS OF OUR WORK IN THE UNITED STATES. AND AT THE SAME TIME THERE WILL BE DISCUSSION AMONG THE PARTIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST THEMSELVES WITH RESPECT TO A NUMBER OF ISSUES WHICH REMAIN UNRESOLVED AMONG THEM. SO THAT WORK WILL BE GOING ON BOTH IN THE UNITED STATES AND HERE DURING THE MONTHS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD. I SAID WITH ONE EXCEPTION. YESTERDAY I EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO PRESIDENT ASAD TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. PRESIDENT

ASAD INDICATED HE WILL AT SOME FUTURE DATE COME TO WASHINGTON TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT. THAT THE PRECISE DATE COULD NOT BE FIXED NOW, BUT THAT HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT AS THE PRESIDENT SUGGESTED IN HIS LETTER, IN EUROPE. AND I WOULD THINK IT LIKELY THAT IS WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

QUESTION: OKAY, I'M SORRY. NOW LET'S GO ON BACKGROUND.
EXCUSE ME.
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QUESTION: INDISTINCT

SECRETARY: YES, THAT POINT WAS MADE TO ME MANY TIMES BY A NUMBER OF THE ARAB LEADERS.

QUESTION: ARE YOU IN ANY WAY UNDERSTANDING OF THAT POSITION?

SECRETARY: LET ME SAY AT THIS POINT THAT I'M ON A FACT FINDING MISSION AND I DON'T WANT TO COMMENT ON SUBSTANTIVE POSITIONS.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, YOU SAID THAT EACH OF THE PARTIES IS PREPARED TO GO TO GENEVA IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1977. ON THE OTHER HAND, TWO OR THREE DAYS BEFORE WE ARRIVED, PRESIDENT ASAD TOLD THE FRENCH PRESS THAT HE IS EXTREMELY DUBIOUS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A GENEVA CONFERENCE CONVENING IN 1977. GIVEN THAT, CAN YOU GIVE US SOMETHING OF THE FLAVOR, THE TONE OF ASAD?

SECRETARY: HE IS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO ACHIEVE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. THERE ISN'T ANY QUESTION ABOUT THAT. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE SEES THE PROBLEMS AS VERY DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX, AS ALL OF US DO, AND THEREFORE, I THINK HE IS MERELY EXPRESSING THE SAME CAUTION AGAINST OVER-OPTIMISM OR A SIMILAR CAUTION AGAINST OVER-OPTIMISM SUCH AS THAT THAT WAS EXPRESSED BY KING HUSSEIN.

QUESTION: HE'S NOT RELUCTANT?

SECRETARY: HE'S NOT RELUCTANT TO WHAT?

QUESTION: TO GO TO GENEVA THIS YEAR?

SECRETARY: NO, HE SAID THAT HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO DO SO.

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QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, I MAY SUFFER FROM OVER-PESSIMISM BUT WHEN YOU SAY THAT NOBODY HAS ANY PRECONDITIONS ABOUT GENEVA, AND THEY ANSWERED YOUR QUESTION IN THE AFFIRMATIVE WHEN YOU TALKED ABOUT PRECONDITIONS, IT STILL COMES BACK TO, FOR INSTANCE, LAST NIGHT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT'S STATEMENT DEMANDING THAT ISRAEL WITHDRAW, AND GIVING THE MAXIMUM ARAB (WORD INDISTINCT) ON 242. THE ISRAELI LEADERS IN ISRAEL REPEATED AGAIN THE STANDARD ISRAELI POSITION THAT UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD THEY EVER GIVE BACK ALL THE TERRITORIES BEFORE OCTOBER? DO YOU THINK THESE ARE REALLY JUST OPENING BARGAINING POINTS THAT HAVE BEEN WITH US FOR SO MANY YEARS NOW? OR DO YOU THINK (PHRASE INDISTINCT)?

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SECRETARY: I'M CONVINCED FROM TALKING TO THE PARTIES THAT THESE ARE DEEPLY HELD VIEWS AND THEY WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO CHANGE. ON THE OTHER HAND, I BELIEVE THEM WHEN THEY SAY THEY ARE PREPARED TO COME AND TO DISCUSS AND IF YOU CAN GET PEOPLE SITTING AROUND TOGETHER AND DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES, THEN THERE IS ALWAYS A POSSIBILITY THAT THERE MAY BE CHANGE. BUT I DON'T WANT TO UNDERESTIMATE THE COMPLEXITY AND DIFFICULTY OF IT. I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT I THINK THAT

THERE ISN'T A VERY HARD AND DIFFICULT ROAD AHEAD.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, TWO SPECIFIC POINTS. WHAT DID PRESIDENT ASAD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE IDEA OF A PALESTINIAN STATE IN CONFEDERATION WITH JORDAN, AND TWO, WITH EITHER ASAD OR WITH ANY OTHER, DID THE IDEA COME UP OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN STATE IN EXILE IN ORDER TO GET AROUND THE COVENANT QUESTION?

SECRETARY: LET ME SAY THIS, THAT WE DISCUSSED WITH HIM THE QUESTIONS WHICH YOU HAVE JUST RAISED. HE VERY FRANKLY DISCUSSED UNCLASSIFIED

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THEM WITH ME. I DON'T THINK IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO GIVE THOSE TO YOU. IF HE'S GOING TO GIVE A PRESS CONFERENCE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO ASK HIM ABOUT THOSE VIEWS TODAY. I DON'T THINK IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO TALK ABOUT THEM.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, ONE OF YOUR PURPOSES IN COMING ON THIS TRIP WAS TO TRY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS ARMAMENTS BUILDUP IN THE MIDDLE EAST. COULD YOU TELL US WHAT YOUR CONCLUSIONS ARE ON THIS SCORE?

SECRETARY: AS I SAID, EVERYONE AGREES THAT THEY'VE GOT TO FIND SOME WAY TO CUT BACK ON THE ARMAMENT BURDEN WHICH IS JUST CRUSHING EVERY ONE OF THEM. AND THEY ALL SAY THAT THEY WOULD LOVE TO BE ABLE TO STOP PURCHASING ARMS, BUT THEY SAY HOW CAN WE DO THIS UNLESS WE GET AN AGREEMENT ACROSS THE BOARD AT THIS POINT THAT EVERYBODY ELSE IS GOING TO DO THE SAME THING? SO THAT ALTHOUGH THEY AGREE IN PRINCIPLE, THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE APPEARS TERRIBLE DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, AT THIS POINT.

QUESTION: DO YOU SEE THERE IS A ROLE FOR THE US TO PLAY IN THIS PROCESS?

SECRETARY: YES, I THINK THERE IS. THIS IS A GENERAL PROPOSITION THE ADMINISTRATION IS WORKING ON, AND ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL AREAS OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S CONCERN. IT IS GOING TO BE MORE DIFFICULT IN THE MIDDLE EAST, I THINK, THAN IN MOST OTHER PLACES BECAUSE OF THE TENSION THAT EXISTS IN THE AREA.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, YOU SAID BEFORE YOU CAME THAT YOU WERE GOING TO PRESS ALL THESE LEADERS TO THE UNCLASSIFIED

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LIMITS AND YOU WERE GOING TO LOOK FOR GIVE. CAN YOU
TELL US IF YOU FOUND ANY GIVE WITH ASAD? AND A LITTL BIT
ABOUT IT IF YOU DID?

SECRETARY: I'M NOT GOING TO GO INTO DETAILS WITH
RESPECT TO HIS VIEWS AS I HAVEN'T WITH OTHERS
BECAUSE I DON'T THINK IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR
ME TO DO SO. I FOUND HIM UNDERSTANDING AND HAD THE
FEELING THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO LISTEN TO OTHER
PEOPLE AND WEIGH THEIR VIEWS AT ANY PEACE CONFERENCE.
I THINK THAT'S ALL I OUGHT TO SAY. I DON'T WANT
TO CHARACTERIZE ANY FURTHER THAN THAT. THANK YOU.
UNQUOTE.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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